



EBT WIRELESS PROJECT

December 09 Newsletter



DHS

From the Editor – Jan Walters

Total Transactions	EBT Transactions	Total Sales on Wireless
2008 Total: 27,701	4257 (15.4% of total)	\$724,703
2009 Totals:		
January 09 265	17 (6.4%)	\$14,678
February 291	42 (14.4%)	\$23,494
March 382	39 (10.2%)	\$26,075
April 579	44 (7.6%)	\$28,492
May 4134	448 (10.8%)	\$145,541
June 3897	715 (18.3%)	\$92,723
July 4299	1217 (28.3%)	\$74,445
August 5168	1541 (29.8%)	\$89,825
September 4934	1242 (25.2%)	\$103,249
October 5057	539 (10.6%)	\$130,453
November 1734	96 (5.2%)	\$54,405
December		
2009 Total 31,121 (thru Nov.)	5949 (19.1%)	\$783,510

November Facts:

Year to date sales for 2009 are \$783,510 compared to \$666,696 a year ago. This is an increase of 17.5%. **Year to date EBT sales are \$60,511 compared to \$41,346 from a year ago. This is an increase of 46.3%.** The number of EBT transactions at farmers markets has also increased dramatically. As of November 30, 2009, there have been 5949 EBT transactions compared to 4230 last year. This is a 40.6% increase. In November, the average EBT purchase amount was for \$15.11. The average commercial purchase (debit, credit card) was for \$30.54.

In November 2009, there were 150,300 Food Assistance/EBT families in Iowa. \$42 million in benefits were issued in November to these families.

Here are other interesting facts regarding November sales:

There were 106 farmers/producers who were active during November. There were 37 who had EBT sales. There was only one vendor with 10 or more EBT sales this month: Hoffman Produce

For November, Hoffman Produce had the highest number of EBT transactions and the greatest amount of EBT sales. Greg Hoffman is from the Waterloo area. Hoffman Produce began using wireless equipment in 2006. Kudos to the Hoffman Family!

Urgent: Survey Responses Needed

Due to the low number of surveys that DHS has received, we have extended the deadline to Thursday, December 24th. The information that is learned from the surveys is shared with the USDA as well as other states, cities and non-profit organizations. Many states and farmers markets across the country want to learn more about the Iowa Project so they can begin accepting EBT at farmers markets. In past years, we've always had an excellent response rate.

Returning the survey is one of the requirements that you agreed to when you joined the Wireless EBT Project (See Addendum form). We understand that it's the holiday season and everyone is very busy. But we really need a greater number of responses to more accurately reflect the thoughts and opinions of all farmers participating in our program. Please help us out. If you haven't returned your survey please take a few minutes, fill it out and return it to DHS. Thanks to the farmers that have returned their surveys! Our fax number is 515-281-7791. Or you may email the response to Tracy Penick at tpenick@dhs.state.ia.us.

Budget Issue – PIN Encryption with TMS (Nurit equipment)

DHS staff recently sent an email/letter regarding a new identified cost for the Nurit wireless equipment. Some of our older wireless devices require a new PIN encryption. If your wireless device has DUKPT on the bottom, then your machine will require a new encryption. Unfortunately, this is a process that cannot be completed over the phone. We're required to ship the wireless device to TMS. This means additional costs for DHS.

As our budget has been reduced this year, there are no funds to cover this additional cost. DHS management has determined that we will reduce the cost of supplies by the cost of the PIN encryption. DHS is still waiting for TMS to verify the process so we can finalize cost estimates. TMS is paying for the actual cost of the PIN encryption. **If** the total cost of shipping is \$1600, then we will reduce our supply budget for paper, batteries, cords, etc by the \$1600.

There is no way we can predict if or when the supply budget will be exhausted. You may be required to purchase paper or batteries to keep the equipment operational. It is extremely important when buying paper that you only purchase '**thermal impact paper**'. Other types of paper will ruin the equipment. If you insert the wrong type of paper, you will be responsible for the \$99 replacement fee for the device. Also remember, the cost of supplies may be tax deductible. For a copy of the original letter mailed to you, contact Tracy or Jan. More information on this topic will be announced in future newsletters.

Total Merchant Services (TMS) Statements

Some of our farmers that we shut down on November 2nd for seasonal closures, ended up having November fees withdrawn from their bank accounts on December 2nd. After some research, DHS learned that TMS cuts off the monthly statements on the **last business day** of the month which would have been October 30th. So farmers that went to their last farmers market on Saturday, October 31st and ran transactions were hit with November fees. This is the first time in the five years of our program that this has happened. Please remember that DHS has reimbursed those farmers for the fees that we normally do. Also, it is a good time to remind all of you to always keep funds in your bank accounts to avoid overdraft fees.

Ames Farmers Market – October 10th

Tracy visited the North Grand Mall Farmers Market in Ames on Saturday, October 10th. Although, it was very cold and snowy there were several shoppers braving the weather conditions. The participating farmers there that day were DeMoss Pumpkin Farm, Martin's Gardens, and Story Book Orchard. All of our farmers were in one aisle at the market and all had their metal A-frame signs right in front of their stands. It was very obvious who accepted EBT!



DeMoss Pumpkin Farm



Martin's Gardens



Story Book Orchard

Update on Food Assistance

We have been asked by one of our farmers to do a little refresher course on Food Assistance. Food Assistance (formally referred to as Food Stamps) is also called SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) is the plastic card that the Food Assistance benefits are loaded on each month.

Food Assistance customers CAN purchase meats, honey, eggs, baked goods, fruits, vegetables, jams, jellies, seeds, and food bearing plants. Food Assistance customers CAN NOT purchase hot prepared foods or hot drinks. You can lose the certification with FNS by accepting EBT as payment for hot prepared foods or hot drinks. If you are no longer a FNS retailer, you will not be able to participate in the EBT Wireless Project.

Reminder on wireless machines

We have been getting a lot of questions lately concerning the wireless machines. When you turn on your wireless machine a screen will pop up that says GPRS Providers. It is imperative when you see this screen that you chose option 2 Default NCC Prvd. If you don't chose option 2 it is going to go into the manual option and your wireless machine will be slow and may not work. Remember if you are not sure if you chose option 2 you can turn off your machine and start it back up to ensure that you chose option 2.

Call Us!!!

We try very hard to keep all of the farmers involved in the Wireless EBT Project informed of important issues that affect our program. So it is very important that you read the e-mails and letters that we send you and respond, if asked, in a timely manner. If we need feedback from you and you don't respond then it takes a lot of time for Tracy to follow up with all of you to get the information that is needed. Also, please make sure that we have your current e-mail address so that you are receiving our correspondence.

Upcoming Events

IA Fruit & Vegetable Growers Conference – January 29th & 30th at Holiday Inn Des Moines Airport/Conference Center.

Farmers Market Conference –February 20th at First Christian Church, 25th & University, Des Moines

Customer Survey Results for 2009

The customer survey response so far is phenomenal! **Just a reminder, please put the cards in the sack of any customer, especially those who use a plastic card for payment.** We've had many responses from customers who paid with cash. The comments are interesting, but we really want feedback from those who are using plastic (EBT, debit or credit). If you need more cards, contact Tracy. Here are the results so far:

- Why do you like to shop at farmers markets? (Top reasons in descending order)
 - Good/fresh food (122)
 - Fresh Produce (96)
 - Buy locally grown/made items (59)
 - Support local farmers (45)
 - It's Fun/relaxed atmosphere/music (20)
- How often do you shop at farmers markets?
 - Every week – 53%
 - Every 2 weeks –12%
 - Once or twice a month– 11%
 - More than once a week – 9%
 - As much as I can –4%
 - 3 out of 4 weeks – 3%
 - Not often - 4%
 - Other - 4%
- What markets do you shop at? (Top 6 responses thus far)
 - Davenport (Northpark & Freight House) – 76
 - Iowa City/Coralville – 65
 - Unknown – 52 (Respondents failed to answer question)
 - Des Moines (Downtown, Drake, Valley Junction) - 34
 - Cedar Rapids – 22
 - Burlington - 15
- What did you buy today at the market? (Top 7 in descending order)

- Fresh produce - 234
- Baked goods – 155
- Honey/Jam & jelly – 38
- Flowers – 31
- Vegetable plants/fruit trees/bushes - 30
- Meat – 28
- Eggs - 10
- What would you like to buy but can't find at the market? (in descending order)
 - More Fruit – 11
 - Eggs - 8
 - More meat vendors - 4
 - Parsnips – 3
 - Sweet corn - 3
 - Cheese - 3
 - Lots of other things, such as (goat milk, fresh juice, shrimp, eggplant, arts & crafts, etc)
- If a year round market was in your area, would you shop at it during the winter months?
(Apparently, the question should have specified 'an indoor' year round market. Many customers are assuming that its outside and no produce will be available.)
 - Yes – 77%
 - No – 14%
 - No answer – 6%
 - Depends or already have indoor year-round market – 3%
- What services could the market offer or provide that would make you shop there more often? (in descending order)
 - Restrooms - 63
 - Hand washing stations -51
 - Canning/freezing classes - 32
 - Chairs/sitting areas to relax & eat goodies – 8
 - Others (incl. shade, more variety, music, cooking demos, garbage cans, etc) - 23
- How did you pay for your items today?
 - Cash –61%
 - Credit – 13%
 - Debit – 11%
 - EBT – 13%
 - Other (senior checks/checks) – 2%

Additional comments from customers:

- IA City – I think it would be very cool to have musician walking around during market time.
- Bettendorf – These people have a great market.
- Davenport/Northpark – EBT machine couldn't get a signal.
- IA City – Fun to have a holiday market inside.
- IA City – Fun time. Everyone very friendly. Nice quality items.

Cost of Wireless Equipment

Just a reminder: If you have rental device or a 'free' wireless device and closing down for the season, be sure to get the device mailed back to TMS timely. Otherwise, you could be charged \$750 for the cost of the device. TMS will assume that you are keeping the machine.

If you lose the wireless device, there is a \$750 replacement cost. Total Merchant Services will deduct this amount from your checking account. If the device is stolen, be sure to contact your insurance agent to see if a claim can be filed. Insurance may pay for all or part of the replacement costs.

Signage for the Wireless EBT Project

As Tracy is inputting the annual survey results there have been several comments on the signs for our program. Because of the budget crisis here at the state we will be unable to replace any of your signs. If your table top plastic holder has been damaged, please purchase another one. We buy our plastic holders from Office Max but they are probably available at other stores. The rings for the A-Frame metal signs are just shower curtain rings. These can be purchased at Target or Walmart. When a farmer drops out of our program and the signs are returned to DHS, Tracy cleans the signs with multi-surface Windex and this really helps the signs to look new again. Just a few tips to help you get your equipment ready for next Farmers Market season.

Help DHS Maintain Equipment/Signs

When a farmer no longer wishes to participate in the Wireless Project or DHS cancels the account, it is very important to return all state equipment to DHS. Several farmer accounts were cancelled this fall. We have been dismayed by the condition of the equipment that is returned. Some farmers have not thoroughly read the instructions sent by DHS. As a result, some state owned equipment was mailed to TMS, which we are not able to recover. A couple of farmers have lost or thrown away the signs that we provided.

With the lack of funds to purchase new signs and batteries, we have to keep our equipment in good condition. There will be many new farmers signing up for the project next spring. We want to be able to give them basic equipment such as signs and an extra battery. **We need your help.** Don't store your signs outdoors or in vehicles during the heat of the summer. Keep track of your extra battery. DHS paid for this battery, which costs approximately \$90. Follow the instructions closely when you shut down for the season or permanently. If you have questions about where to send equipment please call Tracy or Jan. With your help, we will have enough equipment to help other new farmers.

Reminders:

1. **Since we have so many new farmers, remember that you cannot ring up a sale for another vendor. You could lose your Food Stamp certification and be terminated from the Wireless Project.**
2. **Since you are paying for the commercial transaction fees, be sure to keep track of what you are paying so you can use those expenses as a tax deduction.**

3. You cannot set a minimum purchase amount. If an EBT household wishes to purchase \$.50 in onions, you do need to process the transaction. Same for any debit or credit transaction.
4. If your machine quits working, be sure to call Jan or Tracy right away! Or if need help during the weekend, you can call 1-888-848-6825 phone number on the side of your machine.
5. Let us know if you need any supplies such as paper rolls, power cords, or battery.
6. The second battery that we provide to you was purchased by DHS. If you ever need to return your wireless machine, be sure to keep one battery, carrying case and signs.
7. **Charge your batteries before market.** You should always have a charged battery, ready to go for market. If a battery is not holding a charge, contact Tracy for a replacement.
10. Please make sure to keep the original box that your machine came in as it contains the Sim card, which is needed to identify your machine if you have to call TMS.

Help Desk

We are here to help you!

When you have questions about:

- **Participating in the Wireless project or reimbursement questions? Call Tracy Penick at 515-281-5545 or Jan Walters at 515-281-3588.**
- **What you can sell to EBT customers, or being authorized to accept EBT? Call FNS at 515-284-4035.**
- **Food Assistance eligibility? Call Char Hansen at 515-281-6820.**